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Book review: Brian Wampler. Activating Democracy in Brazil: Popular Participation, Social Justice, and Interlocking Institutions (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2015)

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2016.00314.x>

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ZORA URL: <https://doi.org/10.5167/uzh-127368>

Journal Article

Accepted Version

Originally published at:

Welp, Yanina (2016). Book review: Brian Wampler. Activating Democracy in Brazil: Popular Participation, Social Justice, and Interlocking Institutions (Notre Dame, Indiana, 2015). *Latin American Politics and Society*, 58(2):179-182.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2016.00314.x>

Wampler, Brian. *Activating Democracy in Brazil. Popular Participation, Social Justice and Interlocking Institutions*. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2015. Tables, figures, abbreviations, notes, references, index. 297 pp.

In Latin America, the transition to democracy prompted the opening of the political system to new forms of citizen participation. The first initiatives observed in the region were developed at the local level in the late 1980s, promoted by the arrival of new social movements and/or leftist parties to the local government with the aim of renovating democracy from the inside. Examples of this wave are the Workers' Party (Partido dos Trabalhadores, PT) in Brazil, the United Left (Izquierda Unida, IU) in Peru, the Broad Front (Frente Amplio, FA) in Uruguay and the Radical Cause (Causa Radical, CR) in Venezuela. The experience of Brazil stands out as the only one of the group that has been able to maintain momentum, while the other experiences have either come to nothing (initiatives promoted by CR and IU) or the local democratic innovations played no major role in policy making at national level (Uruguay). Focussing on an in depth case study of Brazil, *Activating Democracy in Brazil. Popular Participation, Social Justice and Interlocking Institutions* offers answers oriented towards understanding the survival and success of the Brazilian experience.

Brazil presents an ideal case for analysing what is labelled a new 'participatory citizenship regime' because of the long-standing and ever growing presence of participatory institutions. But, as is acknowledged in the introduction, there is a tremendous variation in how citizens and public officials have been able to activate these participatory institutions. This opens questions about how and why there is such variation. To understand this puzzle, Brian Wampler has decided to focus on the study of the participatory model developed in Belo Horizonte between 1992 and 2012. This selection is justified by a gap in the literature. Concretely, the first generation of research on participatory institutions tended to focus on a single institution (e.g. participatory budgeting), the second compared the same institutional type across several cities, while the third, and most recent, focussed on the policy and political impact of these institutions. *Activating Democracy in Brazil* is an in-depth study of the functioning of different participatory institutions, considering the history, the actors and the institutional designs in a given context.

Accordingly, the study draws on different sources: participant observation, elite interviews, original surveys and budgetary and legislative documents. But why Belo Horizonte? Among other reasons, Wampler argues that Belo Horizonte presents positive basic social indicators not directly explained by the modernization account. Thus, while per capita income in Belo Horizonte is lower than that of comparatively rich southern cities such as Porto Alegre and closer to poorer cities in the north such as Salvador, the Human Development Index is closer to its wealthier southern neighbours. Also political reasons justify the selection. Belo Horizonte has been exceptional because of the five terms won by the center-left political coalition which led to a twenty-year period of development of participatory institutions.

The structure of the book gives account of its theoretical, empirical and methodological contributions. Chapter one presents the main concepts and framework. Wampler's central argument is that the promulgation of Brazil's 1988 constitution marks the formal start of the participatory citizenship regime which characterizes the country nowadays. A citizen's regime –according to Yashar (2005)– defines *who* has political membership, *which* rights they possess, and *how* interest intermediation with the state is structured (italics in original). Based on this, Wampler demonstrates

that Brazil's participatory citizenship regime significantly expands who participates in formal policy-making institutions, which political rights can be used to secure social rights and how citizens and government officials negotiate over the allocation of public resources and public goods.

Chapter two moves to the historical background behind the current development of a participatory citizenship regime, exploring also previous regimes ('conceded', 1889-1930; and 'regulated' 1930-1988). Chapter three introduces the local state, showing the extent to which the new system has roots not only in the legal framework but also in the strong municipal executive branch; something which explains also the changes along time that are noted in the analysis of the four governmental periods covered by the book.

Chapters four and five specifically focus on the institutions promoting participatory governance, participatory budgeting, councils and conferences, highlighting on how configurations of actors, political cultures and know-how play a relevant role. Co-governance and social control are identified as main factors granting decision-making authority. As recognized in the title of the book, the participatory citizenship regime rests on three pillars: *popular participation*, including direct participation of citizens in participatory venues; *interlocking institutions*, including the development of formal and informal linkages among government agencies, new democratic institutions, civil society organizations (CSO) and citizens; and *social justice*, with an explicit focus on the extension of universal rights to the entire population.

Popular participation, the first pillar of the participatory model, is analysed through a set of state-sanctioned institutional processes that devote decision-making authority to venues that are jointly controlled by citizens and government officials. These forms of participatory governance are the public policy management councils (conselhos), the thematic policy conferences (conferencias), and participatory budgeting (orçamento participativo). The number of participants is impressive: at least 300'000 Brazilian citizens are elected to participatory institutions in which they have some authority on policy-making; between 2004 and 2012, some six to eight million Brazilians participated in public policy conferences where they contributed to agenda setting; and hundreds of thousands participate in municipal-level participatory budgeting programs.

The concept of interlocking institutions, the second pillar, is understood to be closely related to state capacity. In the participatory architecture, citizens and governments use complementary sources of knowledge and information to improve policy performance. In doing so, participatory institutions are horizontally and vertically integrated. Horizontally, participatory institutions are linked to each corresponding state agency as well as across policy sectors. Vertically they are linked from the local neighbourhood level to municipal and eventually the federal level. In this study, state capacity proves to be a pre-condition for the effectiveness of these institutions, discouraging expectations of a positive role of participation in case of weak state capacity.

The third pillar of the model is social justice. An outstanding particularity of Brazil's participatory citizen regime is the focus on the poor. This relates to the particular mechanisms used to promote redistribution through participation. For example, the Workers Party government developed a Quality of Life Index which provides the technical rules to legitimize the allocation of resources to poor communities. This index allows the establishment of a map of public and private infrastructure, based on data already collected by the state, and helps to connect demands and needs to the technical and professional expertise of the local state. Accordingly, the regime moves beyond

the liberal conceptualization of individual rights central to representative democracy and allocates resources to poor communities. At the same time, Wampler argues, it encourages citizens to participate, thereby increasing the development of human capabilities, although his findings suggest that citizens and CSO leaders participate because their engagement directly influences how resources are used and policies are designed. By participating, they help to secure public works and social services expected to reshape their lives.

Chapter six presents a detailed analysis of civil society organizations, fed by data from a survey and fieldwork. Chapter seven offers a more ethnographic account of how participatory institutions play a role in two favelas (Morro de Papagaio and Alto Vera Cruz). Finally, the last chapter makes an effort to identify the main factors explaining the conditions of success and failure. There, Wampler points out that the variation across the policy arenas analysed in the book is due to the interplay of factors such as state formation, the development of civil society, government support for voice and vote, the source and level of public resources and the specific participatory rules that regulate citizen participation, representation and deliberation.

Wampler gives a very powerful role to the new institutional settings created with the Constitution of 1988. Despite being a case study, these findings allow a rethinking of Latin American experiences in general. In this regard, Brazil shares some commonalities with the Andean countries, which through constituent assemblies since the nineties have ‘constitutionalized’ citizen participation by including a wide range of mechanisms in new constitutions (e.g. Colombia 1991, Perú 1993, Venezuela 1999, Ecuador 1998 and 2008, and Bolivia 2009). In Wampler's study of Brazil, three reforms are identified as key, 1) the municipalization of service delivery, authority, and resources, 2) the explicit consent given to subnational government to include direct participation and 3) the expansion of social rights. However, the Colombian constitution of 1991 or the Venezuelan of 1999 also opened these possibilities, but with different outcomes. In this regard, even if *Activating Democracy in Brazil* gives an account of why poor citizens activate mechanisms of participation in the country (based on a combined set of material and symbolic incentives), the arguments to explain why politicians do it still leave room for analysis and especially for comparative work on different institutional and political settings. The role played by the new participatory institutions in reinforcing or weakening executive and legislative local powers, and the combination of participatory practices in clientelistic environments also deserves more study. Last, it must be borne in mind that the participatory processes described in this book are relatively weak in empowering the people, are limited in scope to local matters, and often anyway only have an advisory function. As recent street protests have showed these processes only have limited capacity to address citizens' grievances.

As inspiring books normally do, *Activating Democracy in Brazil* offers new insights and raises new questions. It also offers directions on how to reinforce democracy through participation. Its framework should pave the way for cross-regional and country comparisons.

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